

September 25, 2019

Town of Blue Mountains

Mayor A. Soever, Council & Mr. R. Gibbons:

We have enjoyed a small cottage across from the Bayview Park tennis courts for the past 47 years. During this time there have been many improvements made to the park that benefit the whole community with the result that parking has become a serious problem. In July 2019 we accidentally found out that a new pickleball facility was to be constructed beside the tennis courts. No notification was provided and as a result no one from our community had an opportunity to provide input.

We submitted a letter to Town Hall on July 25th and this was subsequently read at Council on September 9th though we did not receive any notification of receipt of the letter and again given no opportunity to present to Council. In dealing with Town staff we were told that it was a done deal and that tenders had been accepted and construction was due to begin immediately.

There were two other sites considered for this facility: The Beaver Valley Community Center and Tomahawk Park. Tomahawk Park was a perfect location in our opinion; it had all the parking, the space for the facility and washrooms. More importantly it was not in a Residential Area that would be negatively affected by the resultant noise. Picture the noise generated by banging two pieces of plywood together each time the ball is struck, then picture the continual noise generated by up to 16 players on the four courts to be built. The Town staff recognizes how noisy this sport is and intends to spend more of our tax dollars on planting trees to help mitigate the noise.

In our meeting dated September 18th with Ryan Gibbons Director of Community Services, stated that the town has a nursery located at Tomahawk and that they will get the trees from there to buffer the noise. These will be young tree's and will take several years before there will be any sound buffering to be had. When asked if they are aware that "Acoustic Fencing" as well as quiet pickleball paddles for the sport exist, he responded- yes - (that is as far as that comment went). He explained to us that Bayview Park was zoned for this type of recreation and that the level of noise was deemed acceptable. When asked about what the Town would do when they receive noise complaints after it is built, Mr. Gibbons stated that they would be willing to work with us to try to find a solution. Our concern is that any effective solution will be expensive and again come out of the tax payer's pockets. Logic would be not to locate such a facility in a residential area. Residents of cities such as Kingston, ON have made their cases about the noise from pickleball courts and they are now being relocated to non-residential areas.

Mr. Gibbons stated that they are aware of the parking issues in the Bayview Park area. He also mentioned that the Town will be reviewing the parking by-laws, as currently, there are no by-laws regarding parking in the Bayview Park other than the no parking signs on either side of the road by the pavilion. Basically, cars park where ever they wish, on/off the road, on the park grass and the boulevards. He also stated they will possibly be looking into “Pay per use of the facilities” as well as metered parking, to aid in the upkeep of the Park. This could also leave one to think that this may be a way for the Pickleball Club to no longer have to pay to use the Community Center but would in fact be able to run their club out of the publicly funded Bayview Park pickleball courts.

As a tax payer this brings up another issue. This facility is slated to cost \$160,000 and there will be the continuing cost to maintain this. We were told that the money came from Development Charges assessed against new development. This is fine except that these monies are meant to deal with the added needs of an expanding population but here we are spending this money to satisfy a Pickleball Club that has 120 members with a further 40 on the wait list. The population of the Town of Blue Mountains is 7,025 not including seasonal residents who are also year-round tax payers. This means that this group represents around 2% of the population. This 2% dictated not only where \$160,000 of the Development Charge fund was spent, but also where the facility would be built. Harry Stevens who is a member of several pickleball clubs stated in a previous article in the Collingwood Connection that they (the pickleball club) believe “parks are for the enjoyment of all of the community for all types of recreation” well it is a sad day when 2% of the Town of Blue Mountain is dictating to the 98% who will probably never use the facility, but who could 100% of the time enjoy the existing green space and use it as they currently do for walking, dog walking, frisbee, soccer skills, etc. Even people enjoying a quiet game of tennis will no longer have that pleasure.

We have always wondered why our property taxes are so high, obviously if money is being spent on this type of facility to benefit so few and cannot find a better use for these funds, we are indeed paying too much tax. Furthermore, this past week we had an assessment done on our property by a local real estate agent; she commented that the pickleball courts would negatively impact the value of our property as well as any others within earshot. If this is the case, I would hope that MPAC will take this into account when the next assessment takes place.

In a phone conversation on this topic with one of the Town of Blue Mountain Councillors, she responded that she remembers this (pickleball) passing and was surprised that the neighbourhood was not notified she was equally surprised that the neighbourhood was not notified that there will be construction taking place.

Bottom-line, notification should be given to affected parties when new facilities are planned for either public or private property and certainly in the case where our tax dollars are being spent, public input should be mandatory and we would hope that Council will enact a by-law to that effect.

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